

THE CRIMEAN KARAITES IN THE PORTRAYAL OF THE 19TH-CENTURY POLISH TRAVELLERS

Mikhail Kizilov

1. ACCOUNTS OF THE 19TH-CENTURY POLISH TRAVELLERS CONCERNING THE CRIMEAN KARAITES

In the course of the 19th century many Polish travellers, scholars and men of letters visited the Crimean peninsula and left precious notes concerning the ethnic history, traditional culture and way of life of the Crimean Karaites. Some of these travellers have a world-wide renown (A. Mickiewitz), some are known mostly among Polish historians of literature (G. Olizar, E. Hojecki, H. Rzewuski, L. Kondratowicz [Wł. Syrokomla]), some seem to be almost entirely forgotten both by scholars and general public (K. Kaczkowski, A. Marcinkowski [A. Nowosielski],¹ H. Skirmuntowa [Pojata],² L. Hlebnicki-Józefowicz³). In spite of their undoubted value and importance, traveller's notes concerning the Crimean Karaites, have not really been investigated by students of Karaism; paradoxically,

¹ All the author's names have been given according to the Polish spelling. A. Mickiewitz (1798–1855), probably the most famous Polish poet, the author of the national epic story *Pan Tadeusz*; Gustav Olizar (1798–1865), a poet, writer and public figure; Edmund Hojecki (Charles Edmond, 1822–1899), a writer and translator; Henryk Rzewuski (1791–1866), a member of a noble Polish family, writer and public figure; Karol Kaczkowski (1797–1867), an author of many scientific works, famous physician; Antoni Marcinkowski (A. Nowosielski, 1823–1880), a critic, writer, folklorist; Ludwik Kondratowicz, a writer and poet, published most of his writings under the pseudonyme "Władysław Syrokomla".

² St. Makowski supposed that the pen-name "Pojata" was used by Helena Skirmuntowa (1827–1874) who spent about two years in 1869–70 in Balaklava in the Crimea (Makowski 1969: 18).

³ L. Hlebnicki-Józefowicz was attributed by St. Makowski as the author of another valuable travel account published in the Polish journal *Kłosa* in 1877 (Makowski 1969: 18). The absence of the author's name in the most of the Polish reference editions and textbooks testifies that he did not leave any considerable trace in Polish literature.

even the Crimean scholars seem to be largely unaware of the importance of the memoirs of Polish travellers for the history of their region.⁴

Before analysing travellers' data, it is worth mentioning the name of another Polish author, scholar and statesman Tadeusz Czacki, whose essays on the history of the Polish Karaites, first published in 1807, greatly influenced practically all academic scholarship related to the field of the Karaite studies published in the course of the 19th century.⁵ His *Rozprawa o Karaitach* ('Essays on the Karaites'), though full of mistakes and inaccuracies, for its own time was one of the earliest pioneer attempts to investigate the history of the East European Karaites. It seems that it was this essay that evoked the interest of many Polish, Russian and Western scholars and travellers in the Crimean Karaites and greatly stimulated their eagerness to visit the Karaite sites and monuments in the Crimea. Unfortunately, the influence of Czacki's essay upon travellers' writings was not always positive.⁶

2. THE CRIMEAN KARAITES IN THE POLISH TRAVELLERS' PORTRAYAL

2.1. Settlements

While describing the Karaite population of the Southern Russia and the Crimea, travellers noted the presence and settling down of the Karaites practically in all large ports and cities of the region.

Gözlev (Eupatoria), one of the most important Crimean ports in the 19th century, was frequently described by the travellers as the settlement with the largest Karaite community in the Crimea. K. Kaczkowski, who visited Eupatoria in 1825, mentioned that the Tatars called the city "Guzlewe", Russian and Poles "Kozłów", whereas the official title was "Eupatorja". The traveller estimated its

⁴ Brief analysis of Nowosielski's and Syrokomla's accounts in Meir Bałaban's major work (Bałaban 1927) together with rather biased quotations from their testimonies in several articles written by Karaite authors (e.g. Szapszał 1933–34; Bezekowicz 1998) seem to be the only significant references to the accounts I intend to study in this paper.

⁵ Czacki 1807: 246–272; the only known translation to European languages is the 19th-century Russian translation "Issledovanie o evrejah karaitah" published in the *Severnyj Arhiv* in 1827. The Karaites themselves also paid a great attention to this work; see Miller 1993a: 144.

⁶ Many travellers did not indulge themselves to collect historical data concerning the Karaites and advance their own theories, reducing their historical excursions to the Karaite past just to direct quotations from Czacki: Hojecki 1845: 213–216; Nowosielski (Marcinkowski) 1854: 195–199. One of the foci of my article, K. Kaczkowski, inserted into the speech of the Karaite rabbi of Chufut-Kale not the rabbi's own words, but direct quotations from Czacki (in Kaczkowski 1829: 101–102).

population as 5,000 inhabitants, mostly Tatars and Karaites. Kaczkowski, who happened to visit Gözlev on Saturday, noticed that “all the streets were filled with the Karaites, because it was *szabas*.” The houses of the Tatars and Karaites, built in Oriental style with the windows directed to the inner courts of the buildings,⁷ rather depressed him: “it seems that there were as many isolated dwellings of madmen as houses.”⁸ E. Hojecki briefly mentioned that at the time of his travel (1843) the Karaite population of Gözlev consisted of 1,200 Karaites.⁹

The description of Gözlev (1850) provided by A. Nowosielski (1850) seems to be of especial significance: one does not really need a time-vehicle in order to get a comprehensive picture of the town-life of this city in the 19th century. Whilst reading Nowosielski’s memoirs one can easily visualize a large Crimean port during the hot summer, its crooked narrow streets and dirty houses, patchwork of various ethnic groups, contamination of Oriental and European cultures, the Karaites, Tatars and Greeks sitting in silence in their coffee-houses, smoking long tobacco-pipes and drinking coffee. In the traveller’s opinion, “Gozlewe”, the Tatar name of the city, should be translated as ‘caves’ or ‘underground hollows’ because of the fact that under the Turkic and Tatar dominion, when representatives of non-Muslim denominations did not have the right of erecting houses of prayer on the ground, the Karaite population of the town established the synagogues in the underground caves.¹⁰ Nowosielski estimated that the Karaite community of Gözlev amounted to 500 families, so that “the population of Eupatoria consisted mainly of Karaites”. In spite of Nowosielski’s vision of mutual understanding and peaceful co-existence of all ethnic groups that inhabited Gözlev, in his opinion, the Tatars despised the Karaites and called them by the pejorative designation “Czufut”.¹¹ Having been greatly impressed by the large Karaite syna-

⁷ Typical 18th–19th-century Karaite houses were surrounded by the blind wall so that insolemn eyes of strangers could not disturb serene Oriental intimacy of its habitants. They usually were two-storey houses, with windows and balconies directed into the inner court of the building; the master of the house lived in the upper part of the building, whereas the lower one was often used as a stable. See also Szapszal 1896: 21.

⁸ Kaczkowski 1829: 38–40. All quotations from the Polish sources are given here in the translation of the author of this article.

⁹ Hojecki 1845: 217. This numerical estimation seems to be very correct, unlike exaggerated data of Kaczkowski and Nowosielski. According to the census of 1866 there were 1525 Karaites and 325 Jews in Eupatoria (Remy 1872: 5).

¹⁰ Nowosielski 1854: 27, 36. The traveller also maintained that in Eupatoria, according to the local tradition, there were such caves concealed under the houses and connected one to another; he also mentioned that one of these underground synagogues existed until 1803. In all probability, this “underground” etymology of the city’s name is a reference to the existence of the real underground Karaite synagogue in Gözlev which functioned during the period of the Crimean Khanate (see Drachuk, Smirnova & Chelyshev 1979: 128).

¹¹ Nowosielski 1854: 42. The official term used by the Turks and Tatars for the designation of the Judaic subjects of the Crimean Khanate was *yahudi* (in plural *yahudiler*), whereas in the

gogue built in the beginning of the 19th century, the traveller dedicated several pages of his travelogue to its splendour, paying special attention to the description of its inner courts, marble monuments with Hebrew inscriptions and a number of other details.¹²

Chufut-Kale (Turk. 'Jews' Fortress'), one of the so-called Crimean "cave-towns", the main settlement of the Karaites in the 15th–18th centuries, was built on a high rocky mountain situated close to the Khanate's capital, Bakhchisarai.¹³ It attracted much of the European travellers' attention while being not only a historical site but also a living town inhabited by an enigmatic Judaic sect. A. Mickiewitz, who visited the Crimea in August–October 1825, entitled one of his Crimean sonnets "Droga nad przepaścią w Chufut-Kale" ('The Road over the Precipice in Chufut-Kale') and dedicated several lines of his commentaries to the sonnets to a brief description of this town.¹⁴ Traditionally it is believed that Mickiewitz composed this romantic sonnet under the impression of his visit to Chufut-Kale.¹⁵

Information of Mickiewitz's friend Gustav Olizar, who stayed in the Crimea in 1823–25 and hosted the poet in his villa in Gurzuf (Crimea's southern coast), is quite important also for those interested in the history of Russia. The traveller disproves all rumours about the violent death of the Russian emperor Alexander I in November 1825 and maintains that the real reason of the Emperor's mortal disease was the cold caused by the trip to "bardzo chłodną górę, dla zwiedzenia Karaitkiego miasta Kale" ('a very cold mountain for a visitation of the Karaite town Kale') which he undertook in a very light uniform in spite of the warning of his Tatar guide.¹⁶

spoken language of the Crimean Tatars the Karaites were called *zülüfsüz chufutlar*, i.e. Jews without earlocks. The term *chufut* (*chufutlar*), which had a distinctive pejorative connotation similar to the Russian *zhid*, was used by the Tatars for the designation of the Karaites as well as the Krimchaks. Most of the scholars consider that this term is of Turkic origin, whereas P. S. Pallas' attempt (1801: 662) to explain it as a borrowing from the Italian spoken by the Crimean Genoese is rather doubtful.

¹² Nowosielski 1854: 36–40. The beautiful 19th-century building of the Eupatorian Karaite synagogue situated on the Karaimskaja str. 68 is now open for visitors. It was restored by the local Karaite community (now consisting of approx. 100 members) in 1999; religious services were resumed in the smaller synagogue.

¹³ For details concerning the history of the town, see Gertsen & Mogarichev 1993.

¹⁴ Mickiewitz 1826.

¹⁵ However, it is quite evident that the poet's commentaries represent a compilation of the description of Chufut-Kale from the account of the Russian traveller I. M. Murav'ev-Apostol (1823: 127–128).

¹⁶ Olizar 1892: 181. The Russian emperor visited Chufut-Kale in 1824. It seems that in 1825 he visited only the Karaite community in Eupatoria; in the commemoration of his visit, which took place on November 1, 1825 (i.e. indeed a short time before Alexander's death), a

K. Kaczkowski, who visited Chufut-Kale in 1825, described the town as the seat of the main Karaite rabbi,¹⁷ full of people, with hundreds of houses built right on the rocky surface of the mountain.¹⁸ E. Hojecki was also lucky to see Chufut-Kale in 1843, still inhabited by a considerable amount of people; he estimated its population as 500 Karaites. A young Karaite rabbi invited the traveller and his companions to his house, showed them the synagogue, but did not allow to see the town in its entirety because of the existence of certain private places which should not be seen by strangers.¹⁹ A. Nowosielski, who visited the town only seven years later (1850), could witness the devastating effect of the mass emigration of its inhabitants which reduced the town's population to only 50 families.²⁰

H. Skirmuntowa (Pojata), who paid a visit to "spokojną republikę czufutkalskich Hebreów" ('a peaceful republic of Chufut-Kale Hebrews') or "Syon tauriskich Izraelitów" ('Zion of Taurida Israelites') in 1869–70, described the settlement as completely abandoned, haunted by the wild dogs and inhabited only by A. Firkovich's family.²¹ K. Hlebnicki-Józefowicz, who visited the town in 1877 (i.e. three years after the death of the Karaite patriarch), left it even more dissatisfied: "I left this bare rock with unpleasant feeling in my soul: it was empty, sorrowful and wild; only precipices and ruins were before my eyes – a real Dante's place." At the time of his visit, the only inhabitants of the place were remote relatives of A. Firkovich from Wilno, who were quite happy to hear the Polish speech of the traveller.²²

Magnificent ruins of Mangoup, another Crimean cave-town, whose 16th–18th-century population consisted of the Karaites, Tatars and a Turkish garrison, still can be seen on the flat plateau of the mountain Baba-Dag, 20 km from

splendid monument was erected in one of the inner courts of the Eupatorian synagogue in 1851.

17 The travellers did not know the terms *hakham* and *hazzan* used by the Karaites for the designation of their spiritual authorities and called them *rabbi* or *rabin*.

18 Kaczkowski 1829: 100.

19 Hojecki 1845: 217. The young rabbi may be identified as Solomon Beim (see below, 2.4). His house, which was situated close to the house of Abraham Firkovich, is still in a very good state of preservation.

20 In 1830 the population of Chufut-Kale was 1120 people, i.e. 645 men and 575 women (Dubois de Montpereux 1843: 339). The main places of the migration were Bakhchisarai, Eupatoria, Theodosia, Cherson, Odessa, Nikolaev and other trading cities situated nearby (Nowosielski 1854: 190). According to S. Szapszał (1896: 16), this mass emigration started in 1846.

21 "Chufut-Kale ... has gone! Only my father keeps it. Except us, nobody lives here, everybody has left it" – Firkovich's daughter explained to Pojata (Pojata 1871: 222).

22 Hlebnicki-Józefowicz 1877: 165.

Bakhchisarai.²³ The Polish traveller to the Crimea St. Siestrzencewicz de Bohusz (1731–1826), the archbishop of Mohilev and the metropolitan of the Roman Catholic churches of Russia, was lucky to see the town still peopled by its last inhabitants at the last quarter of the 18th century.²⁴ In the later edition of his memoirs, Siestrzencewicz wrote: “Ils [i.e. the inhabitants of Mangoup – MK] se sont transportés à Tschefout-Kale.” This remark reflects the fact that the migration of the Karaite community of Mangoup to Chufut-Kale took place in the beginning of the last decade of the 18th century.²⁵

Thus, the 19th-century travellers could but mention an once powerful now ruined medieval town and briefly describe its monuments. E. Hojecki (1843) described in detail the ruins of the abandoned town, but he did not leave much information concerning its Karaite inhabitants.²⁶ While describing the Karaite monuments of Mangoup, Pojata (1869–70) mentioned “the Hebrew cemetery of the Karaites”²⁷ and explained the etymology of the placename *Tabana Dere* (‘the Valley of Tanners’, the ravine where the cemetery is situated) by the profession of the Karaites: “Those protestant-Israelites, with the diligency peculiar to their tribe, ventured to use ancient caves and establish a tannery there.” At the time of her travel, all remains of the former splendour of the town had disappeared and the magnificent towers “defended only emptiness and the miserable Karaite ruins”.²⁸

The Polish travellers also mentioned the presence of the Karaites in a number of other large Crimean cities (Simferopol, Theodosia, Bakhchisarai, Karasubazar).

²³ For details concerning the history of Theodoro-Mangoup, see Gertsen 1990.

²⁴ According to our estimates, the metropolitan’s travel took place approximately at the time of the Russian annexation of the Crimea, most probably in 1783–85.

²⁵ Siestrzencewicz de Bohusz, *Histoire de la Tauride* (the 1800 and 1824 editions) cited by Stearns 1978: 21. It is possible to conclude that the Karaites left Mangoup in 1791–92 (Pallas 1801: 125); in 1833, P. I. Koepfen was informed by the Karaite sage Mordecai Sultanski that by 1783 there were about 70 Karaite families in Mangoup which left the town in 1791 (Koepfen 1837: 290).

²⁶ Hojecki 1845: 123–127.

²⁷ Pojata 1873: 250: “Hebrajski cmentarz Karaimów”. Several tombstone inscriptions from this cemetery, which consisted of approximately a thousand graves, were published by A. Firkovich in *Abne zikkaron* (1872).

²⁸ Pojata 1873: 250. Engagement of the Mangoup Karaites into tanning of hides was mentioned by other travellers (Pallas 1801: 122). The Crimean historian F. Kondaraki (1872: 421) counted about ten *tabans*, i.e. baths for tanning, situated in the upper part of the *Tabana Dere*.

2.2. External appearance, manners and customs

Travellers frequently mentioned that in manners, customs, language, cuisine and traditional dress the Karaites resembled their Muslim neighbours, i.e. Crimean Tatars and Ottoman Turks. This seeming affinity with Muslims rarely deceived the voyagers: practically all of them considered the Karaites to be a part of Jewish people who differed from the more numerous Rabbanite Jews in some religious and everyday matters.

Much attention to the description of the external appearance and manners of the Crimean Karaites was dedicated by A. Nowosielski. The traveller often emphasized their distinctive Palestinian look which sharply distinguished them from other European or Turkish inhabitants of the Crimea: "... this man with the black beard, black eyes, thick black eyebrows and large aquiline nose, those women with physiognomies and features of the East ... presented the image of Chopin, depicted somewhere in Syria. It would be enough ... to give you the image of Rebecca while giving water to the camels of Abraham's servant."²⁹ When describing the family of the Karaite *hakham* Simha Babovich, Nowosielski mentioned that in the eyes of the members of his family "sparkled the fire ... of a strong feeling, the feeling which could be nourished only in the East, where the members of the family are never divided, but raised, brought up and receive education together over the Bible, whence come all life and all science."³⁰

According to the traveller's observation, the Karaites "dress themselves in the Tatar fashion and live like the Tatars; their dress usually consists of a long robe made of light silky cloth, which is girded with belt, and a wide cloth garment with wide sleeves, which is worn above ... *Krymka*³¹ made of sheepskin is worn on the head. Old people wear beards whereas young ones are shaved."³² K. Kaczowski left a similar description of the Karaite manner of dressing: "The dress of the Karaites is quite decent and to a great extent similar to the Turkish one: a wide striped gown with short sleeves constitutes the upper dress worn together with

²⁹ Nowosielski 1854: 17–18. H. Rzewuski, who met Babovich's family in 1825, described it practically in the same way: "des mœurs patriarcales ... et sa jeune fille richement habillée, qui nous présentait l'eau, tout cela était un véritable chapitre de la Genèse" (Szapszal 1933–34: 6).

³⁰ Nowosielski 1854: 48–49.

³¹ "A lofty thick felt cap, faced with wool: this is heavy, and keeps the head very hot" (Clarke 1816: 194).

³² Nowosielski 1854: 195. E. Clarke (1816: 194) noticed in 1801 that the Karaites, as well as the Tatars, "suffer their beards to grow". In 1838 J. Kohl observed that the Karaites had very peculiar beards which were almost entirely shaved on whiskers and allowed to grow at the full length on the chin" (Kohl 1841: 262–263).

striped trousers; *kolpack*, which is worn on the head, is usually made of black sheepskin and is peculiar only to the Karaites.³³ Nevertheless, A. Nowosielski noted that the younger generation of the Karaites, especially in large cities, preferred wearing European dress to the traditional one.³⁴

The travellers documented other Karaite cultural borrowings from the Tatar surrounding as well. Such was, in their opinion, the patriarchal Oriental attitude of the Karaites towards their wives who were secluded from other world and bound to spend their lives in the close walls of their dwellings.³⁵ The way in which the Karaites spent their pastime also seemed to the travellers to be very Muslim and Oriental. A. Nowosielski in detail described the atmosphere of the Tatar coffee-houses in Gözlev where “the Tatars, Karaites and Greeks sit, drink coffee, smoke pipe and keep silence or slowly talk.”³⁶ Equally Oriental and strange seemed to the voyagers the architecture of Karaite houses.³⁷ When speaking about the language of the Crimean Karaites, the travellers mentioned that the Karaites used the language of their neighbours, the Tatars, for the everyday matters and retain Hebrew as the sacred language used during the prayers; many of the younger generation (especially men) already spoke Slavic vernaculars of their neighbours, Russians and Poles.³⁸

Most travellers mentioned that the Karaites professed a special type of Judaism peculiar exclusively to their sect, and they described Karaite religious practices as the features which differentiated the Karaites from their Muslim, Christian and Talmudic neighbours.³⁹ Polish travellers supplied very important information concerning the inner furnishing and external view of the Karaite

³³ Kaczkowski 1829: 40.

³⁴ However, even such Europeanized Karaites wore *krynka* which would differentiate them from other people (Nowosielski 1854: 195).

³⁵ E. Hojecki mentioned that “the Karaite women are not used to be shown to the strangers” (Hojecki 1845: 218).

³⁶ Nowosielski 1854: 29. A similar picture of mutual friendship and consent between various Crimean ethnic groups (Jews, Karaites, Tatars, Greeks, Armenians) sitting in coffee-houses was depicted by A. Demidov in 1837 (Demidov 1840: 499).

³⁷ See above, note 8. The German traveller F. Remy noticed that the Oriental egoism of the Karaites isolated the “house-existence”: “Ihre [i.e. Tatar and Karaite – M. K.] abgeschlossene hausliche Sonderexistenz hat den ohnehin im Orientalen vorwaltenden Egoismus bis zum Extrem ausgebildet” (Remy 1871: 8).

³⁸ Nowosielski 1854: 195–196, 47, 40; Kaczkowski 1829: 103; Hlebnicki-Józefowicz 1877: 165. A. Nowosielski (1854: 195) called the Turkic dialect of the Karaites “idiomat czagałtajski”; H. Rzewulski mentioned that “le Turc est leur langue maternelle, l’hebreu n’est pour eux qu’une langue savante et théologique, exclusif apanage de leur clerge” (Szapszał 1933–34: 6).

³⁹ Unfortunately, when speaking about the historical development of the Karaite sect and certain specific Karaite religious laws and practices, Polish travellers very often just relied on the opinion of T. Czacki and simply quoted his information.

synagogues in Gözlev and Chufut-Kale.⁴⁰ A. Nowosielski was present even at the prayer in the Gözlev synagogue: “During the prayer the Karaites take places before the partition, whereas women are placed on the balconies which reach the middle of the temple. While preparing themselves for the prayer, the Karaites put on their heads a big cap made of white sheepskin instead of the usual black *krymka* ...”⁴¹

2.3. Professions

Most of the travellers mentioned that the Karaites were well known as wealthy and influential merchants: “the trade of the whole Crimea is concentrated in the hands of the Karaites”.⁴² Especially peculiar was the position of the Karaite merchants of Chufut-Kale: because of the fact that they had a number of shops in Bakhchisarai, the capital of the Crimean Khanate, the merchants had to descend from Chufut-Kale in the morning and return back in the evening (around 10–12 miles journey).⁴³ A. Nowosielski noted that in the maritime towns (Odessa, Eupatoria), the Karaites together with the Greeks worked as waggoners and ferrymen; he also mentioned that some of them were involved into such agricultural branches as farming, viticulture and sheep-breeding.⁴⁴ From other travel accounts we know that the Karaites were also known as leather workers, goldsmiths and jewellers.⁴⁵

⁴⁰ Kaczkowski 1829: 100–101; Hlebnicki-Józefowicz 1877: 165; Hojecki 1845: 219; Pojata 1871: 222; Nowosielski 1854: 36–40.

⁴¹ Nowosielski 1854: 39.

⁴² Nowosielski 1854: 43. Such statement was not an exaggeration: according to some estimates, before the World War I, about 40% of the tobacco trade in Russia was concentrated in the hands of the Karaite merchants (Lebedeva 2000: 28). A. Demidov (1840: 477) mentioned that the Karaite merchants “composent l’élite de la population de Kozol”; Mary Holderness (1827: 178) wrote that the Karaites in Gözlev were called *Million Tcheks*. Simha Babovich’s family was also often referred to in the travel accounts as the richest and most influential family in Gözlev (Nowosielski 1854: 35–36; the letter of Rzewuski in Szapszal 1933–34: 130).

⁴³ K. Kaczkowski wrote: “During the daytime only women and few men remain in the town; in the beginning of the day everybody descends to *Bakczyseraj* where they [i.e. the Karaites] have their shops.” He also added that in Bakhchisarai “the Karaites held the biggest trade in their hands” (Kaczkowski 1829: 92, 130).

⁴⁴ Nowosielski 1854: 44–45.

⁴⁵ Pallas 1801: 122; Demidov 1840: 475.

2.4. Personalia

The travellers wrote with deep respect about their meeting with the Karaite leaders. Wł. Syrokomla (L. Kondratowicz) dedicated a considerable part of his travel diary to the description of his rendezvous with the patriarch of the Karaite movement, Abraham b. Samuel Firkovich (1787–1874). The traveller met Firkovich in Vilna in 1854, where the latter, together with his son-in-law, Gabriel Firkovich, was doing some academic work while awaiting the end of the Crimean war.⁴⁶ Syrokomla documented Firkovich's activity at a very interesting point, when the scholar, already crowned with the world renown and considerable success in his enterprises, was in the process of creation of the new concept of the Karaite history, latter fully accomplished in *Abne zikkaron* in 1872.⁴⁷

Syrokomla characterised Firkovich as “a venerable old man ... a well-known archaeologist in the academic world, member of academic societies” who “described ancient graves, collected old manuscripts and brought up undoubtful testimonies about the unbelievably old settling of the Israelites, both Rabbanites and Karaites, in the Crimea”.

In his memoirs Syrokomla related the history of the development of the Karaite movement according to the information which he received from Firkovich. In short, it looks in the following way: The Karaites were the captives of the Assyrian king Salmanazar who arrived in the Crimea during the time of Kambizes, son of *Grus*. Around 750, the Karaites converted the Chazars to Judaism which was proved by the tombstone of Izaak Sangari found by Firkovich; in 980 they tried to convert the Kievan prince Vladimir to the Mosaic faith. Together with Tatars they were settled down in Lithuania by the prince Witold in the 14th century; Witold's charter of 1388 was given exclusively to the Karaites of Lutsk.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Firkovich left Vilna only in August 1856, when the war was over, see Vihnovich 1997: 120–121.

⁴⁷ According to Syrokomla's observation, already at that time Firkovich was preparing this book for publication in Vilna and planned to print it in two languages: Russian and Hebrew.

⁴⁸ Information about Kambizes and the prince Vladimir seems to originate from the Madjalis document found by Firkovich in 1840. The grave of Isaak Sangari, later lost or destroyed, was considered to be a forgery even by many contemporaries of Firkovich (e.g. Karaulov 1893: 97). Alexander Vitold (Vytautas) was the Grand Duke of Lithuania in 1392–1430; Czacki was the first to document the legends about the arrival of the Karaites to Lithuania during the reign of this ruler (Czacki 1807: 267). Vitold's charter of 1388, which had been given to the Jews in Brest, was spread on all Judaic communities of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, including the Rabbanites and less numerous Karaites as well (Lazutka & Gudavichus 1993: 36).

In addition, Firkovich narrated to Syrokomla many romantic stories⁴⁹ about the Karaites and their 17th-century outstanding persons, such as the Karaite knight Naton,⁵⁰ cornet (chorąży) Nisan Jozefowicz, physician at the Radziwiłł court Jezza Nizanowicz (1595–1666)⁵¹ and some others. Syrokomla finishes his narration about Firkovich with the supposition that the patriarch's unparalleled dedication to archaeology "would place his name in the row of the most famous European scholars".⁵²

A description of his meeting with Simeon Baba, i.e. Simḥa b. Solomon Babovich (1790–1855),⁵³ was presented by H. Rzewuski in a letter from June 29, 1825. The traveller characterized Babovich as "le plus riche Caraité l'endroit" and described the hospitality of his house,⁵⁴ a dinner party and a visit to the Eupatorian Karaite synagogue. Moreover, in his letter Rzewuski mentioned that he introduced his companion on the journey, the famous Polish poet A. Mickiewicz, to the Karaite leader. Rzewuski's testimony is extremely interesting; however, its authenticity was questioned by the Polish scholar St. Makowski.⁵⁵

A. Nowosielski left a detailed description of his meeting with the family of Babovich a quarter of century later, in 1850. S. Babovich was, in his opinion, the most influential, powerful and wealthy Crimean Karaite of the period: "the name of this outstanding man is to be found at every step because he is the aristocrate of Kozłow". The traveller also described his visit to the beautiful house of the

⁴⁹ Such were Firkovich's tales about the Karaite knights, who every morning, after the prayer in the synagogue, proudly rode to the Troki castle to serve there as armed guards of Vitold; Syrokomla himself was rather sceptical about it, see Syrokomla 1857: 73.

⁵⁰ Having been sent with an embassy to the Crimean Khanate in the 17th century, on the way back Naton met a gang of robbers. In the fight Naton cut an ear of their leader, acquired his respect and was even awarded for the military courage (Syrokomla 1857: 82). A very similar folktale in the Karaite language tells about Alankasar, a Karaite soldier, who served Vatabiy (Vitold), see Baskakov, Zajonchkovskij & Shapshal 1974: 685–687.

⁵¹ The figure of Jezza Nizanowicz (a corruption of Ezra b. Nisan) seems to be especially important for Firkovich. To Syrokomla Firkovich showed Ezra b. Nisan's medical books and private diary in Hebrew (Syrokomla 1857: 84). In the opinion of M. Balaban (1927: 86, n. 2), the tombstone inscription upon Ezra b. Natan's grave, published by Firkovich in *Abne zikkaron* (p. 251), looks very suspicious.

⁵² Syrokomla 1857: 57–88.

⁵³ Simḥa b. Solomon Babovich, one of the most influential and important figures in the history of East-European Karaites, was the leader of the delegation to St. Petersburg in 1827 and the first Karaite *hakham*. See more about him in Miller 1993a: 20–49.

⁵⁴ The 18th-century house with beautiful wooden decorations, where Babovich invited H. Rzewuski and A. Mickiewicz, is still in a very good state of preservation on the Karaimska str. 53 in Eupatoria; at present it is in a private possession.

⁵⁵ St. Makowski (1969: 189) considers this letter to be either falsified or incorrectly dated. In his view, it is hardly possible that A. Mickiewicz, who visited the Crimea in August–October 1825, could be there already in June 1825. So far I have not been able to locate Rzewuski's letter in the archives in Cracow.

hakham the architecture of which represented a mixture of European and Oriental traditions.⁵⁶ Nowosielski had an opportunity of socializing with Babovich's children (a son and three daughters) while travelling together with them on a boat to Sevastopol. In spite of the fact that, in his opinion, Karaite women lose their beauty very early, he was truly impressed by the appearance of the youngest of S. Babovich's daughters: "she could serve as vignette for Byron's works. Her beautiful chestnut hair was braided into thousands of plaits falling down on her back ..."⁵⁷

Polish travellers left brief remarks about some other outstanding Karaite persons as well. A. Nowosielski wrote about his visit (1850) to a Tatar coffee-house where with an air of importance "a Karaite with two golden medals on his neck was sitting and smoking pipe; he was the head of the city". This person might be identified as Moses Tongur who fulfilled the duties of the mayor of Eupatoria until 1855/1856.⁵⁸ While visiting Chufut-Kale in 1843, E. Hojecki was entertained by the young and polite Karaite rabbi of the town, who should be identified as Solomon b. Abraham Beim.⁵⁹ In spite of the general welcoming and hospitable atmosphere of Beim's house, the traveller could not help noticing the jealousy and irritation of S. Beim when the strangers could incidentally see "the black eyes of the mistress of the house".⁶⁰ H. Rzewuski mentioned a friendly conversation between himself, A. Mickiewicz and an Eupatorian Karaite rabbi, who should be identified as Joseph Solomon Lutski. Both travellers were greatly impressed by the fact that "le bon Rabbin" perfectly knew Polish literature of the period and translated several verses of the Polish poet Trembecki into Hebrew; the travellers and Lutski parted as "amis intimes".⁶¹

2.5. Legends and traditions

The travel memoirs of A. Nowosielski contain a real treasure-house of Karaite folklore collected in Simferopol by Fr. Dąbrowski. Documented by A. Nowo-

⁵⁶ Nowosielski (1854: 25) wrote that the house was "an architectonic miracle".

⁵⁷ Nowosielski 1854: 35–36, 47–49.

⁵⁸ Nowosielski 1854: 29. The author of the article is grateful to Dr Philip E. Miller for his help and advice in this and many other problems this article deals with.

⁵⁹ Solomon b. Abraham Beim (1817/1819–1867) is known as the author of several books and articles on the Karaites written in Russian, e.g. *Pamjat' o Chufut-Kale* ('Memoirs of Chufut-Kale', 1862). He fulfilled duties of the *hazzan* in Chufut-Kale and, later, in Odessa; in Chufut-Kale he also worked as the teacher in the local *bet midrash*.

⁶⁰ Hojecki 1845: 218.

⁶¹ Szapszał 1933–34: 6–7. Joseph Solomon b. Moses Lutski, the author of *Iggeret teshu'at Yiśra'el*, served as the *hazzan* of the Eupatorian synagogue until his death in 1844; for details, see Miller 1993a: 18–45.

sielski these legends, traditions and stories, in which historical persons and events are intertwined with fantasy and imagination (as it is usual with legends), represent a precious anthology of Karaite folklore of the first half of the 19th century.

Nowosielski started his narration with the set of the stories related to the family of Sinan-Chelebis and their settling down in the Crimea. The founder of this dynasty, Mosze-Sinan, a favourite counsellor of the Persian shah, who lived in the 13th century, was sent to the Crimea because of the jealousy of his rivals.⁶² His son Izaak, who inherited the father's honourable title *Czelebi*,⁶³ became an advisor to the Tatar khan Mengli Girej after showing to the latter his acumen in solving a very intricate legal case. While at such an important office, Izaak turned his attention to his people, which were belittled and oppressed by the Muslim authorities to the extent of a forcible conversion to Islam. He received from Mengli Girej a permission to settle down the Karaites in Chufut-Kale where he built a synagogue, school and printing house.⁶⁴ At the time of the visit of Nowosielski, the Karaites still remembered the names of the printers who were hired by Izaak from Constantinople. Especially venerated was the name of Mosze-Pasza, a printer and excellent poet, who could not walk, and described his sufferings in poems.

After Izaak's death his dynasty loosed its importance and a new family, Aga, came to the scene. The first Karaite leader, who received the noble title Aga and gave it to his posterity, was Mardochoj-Ben-Berach (other variants Ben-Beach, Ben-Berech), who was the master of the khans' mint during the reign of Kajlan Girej.⁶⁵ Among other important deeds, Mardochoj-Ben Berach invited a famous Karaite scholar Mardochoj-Ben-Nisan to publish his book in the Crimea. Alas, on his way there the scholar got killed by the Talmudists of Halicz who bitterly hated

⁶² According to a local tradition recorded by A. Firkovich, a Persian Karaite Sinan b. Joseph (Sinan Chelebi), the founder of the clan Sinan-Chelebis, arrived to the Crimea much later, in 1501 (Miller 1993a: 9–10).

⁶³ In the Crimea and Ottoman Turkey the term *chelebi* was initially used for the designation of the Muslim spiritual authorities and young men from the noble families; later it started to be used as the title of civil servants and intelligentsia. This Izaak Czelebi is undoubtedly Isaak b. Moses Sinan Chelebi (c. 1696–1756) under whose auspices the first Karaite printing press was established in Chufut-Kale in 1734.

⁶⁴ Not counting the attempt of organizing a printing house in Constantinople, the typography in Chufut-Kale (later transferred to Eupatoria) was the first typography in the Crimean Khanate and the only independent Karaite typography in the world history; for details, see Miller 1993b.

⁶⁵ In the Crimea and Ottoman Turkey the title *aga* (Turk. 'elder brother') was used for the designation of important military and civil servants; in the Crimea it was also the title of the khans' vizirs, *kalgha* and *nureddin*. In the opinion of Miller (1993a: 10), the Karaite leaders who had the title of *aga* were the scions of the Sinan-Chelebi family. Kajlan Girej is the Crimean khan Kaplan Girey, well remembered by the Karaites because of the fact that the printing press was established in Chufut-Kale during his third rule (1730–36).

him. However, his book was later published in Chufut-Kale under the title *Maar-Mardochoj*.⁶⁶ Mardochoj-Ben-Berach died on the island of Samos, on his way to Jerusalem; as a consequence every Karaite going to the Holy City has to visit the tomb of Mardochoj-Ben-Berach.

During the time of his successor, Szomoil-Aga, the morality of the Karaites started to deteriorate. In order to improve the situation, Szomoil-Aga, who also was a master of the khan's mint, invited many Karaite scholars from abroad (among them Szymche Izaak of Lutsk). In spite of a general respect and veneration, Szomoil-Aga very soon started to inflict the envy and jealousy of his two rivals, Szomolak Aga and Dawid Aga. These two organized assassination, and about 1768 Szomoil-Aga was shot dead on the way to Chufut-Kale. However, his murder, Dawid Aga, did not enjoy his victim's office for a long time, and soon he was displaced by Benjamin Aga.⁶⁷

3. OVERALL IMAGE OF THE CRIMEAN KARAITES IN THE TRAVELLERS' PORTRAYAL

This article demonstrates that the accounts of the European travellers (and the 19th-century Polish travellers among them) represent a valuable and hitherto superficially used source for a better understanding of the history of the Karaites: with the usage of the data from travel accounts – and comparing them to each other and to other types of sources – it is possible to reconstruct many aspects of the history and ethnography of the Karaites, their settlements, quarters and particular monuments in their territories. Moreover, it is possible to come to essential conclusions concerning the way in which the Karaites were perceived by non-Karaite observers.

The content of the accounts analysed here allows drawing the following conclusions concerning the general image of the Crimean Karaites as perceived by the Polish travellers of the 19th century. They were referred to and described as a diligent, trustworthy, wealthy and prosperous ethnic group of Jewish origin and religion, with extremely high moral standards and stable position in the

⁶⁶ Mordecai b. Nisan Kukizow is one of the most authoritative Karaite scholars of the 18th century, the author of the book *Dod Mordekhai*.

⁶⁷ The story about the assassination of Szomoil-Aga, which was told by his wife Giulus (i.e. Gülüş), is especially lengthy and detailed. Szomoil-Aga or Samuel b. Abraham b. Josiah Yerushalmi (1716–1769) was the financial advisor of the khan; in 1768 he was appointed master of the mint (see Z. A. Firkovich 1890: 104–105) and in 1769 killed in a ravine close to Chufut-Kale (later called Kanly Dere 'Bloody Valley' in the commemoration of the event). Benjamin b. Samuel Aga (d. 1824) was his son who served as financial advisor and mint-master of Shagin Girey, the last Crimean khan. Szymche Izaak is Simha Isaac b. Moses Lutski (d. 1766), a famous Karaite scholar, who moved to Chufut-Kale from Lutsk in 1751.

society.⁶⁸ The travellers found them to be similar to the Tatars in numerous everyday customs, the traditional dress and the language. In terms of their professional affiliation, the Karaites were known to the travellers as wealthy and powerful merchants, skilful craftsmen, rarely as waggoners and ferrymen; some of them mentioned their involvement into the agricultural activity. The historical origins of the Karaite movement seemed to the travellers to be rather enigmatic and vague. However, they were of the opinion that the recent discoveries of the Karaite scholar and archaeologist A. Firkovich cast light on a very early arrival of the Karaites to the Crimea, their missionary activity among the Khazars and many other controversial problems.

In spite of the unbelievable amount of valuable ethnographic and historical information supplied by the travellers, one cannot help noticing that the voyagers were not entirely impartial while evaluating the Karaites in such eulogistic way. The travellers, who were Christian believers themselves, always stressed the fact that the Karaites, the only true Biblical Jews, differed in religious and legal practices from other Jews and rejected such Rabbinic inventions as the Talmud and Kabbala. In the last point, perhaps, one can find an explanation of such over-positive evaluation of the moral qualities of the Karaites; the traveller's perception of the Karaites seem to be influenced by the preconception of "the good and obedient" non-Talmudic Jews-Karaites opposed to "the corrupted by the vicious Talmud" Rabbinic Jews.⁶⁹

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- BALABAN, M. 1927. Karaici w Polsce. In: M. Bałaban, *Studia Historyczne*: 1–92. Warszawa.
- BASKAKOV, N. A., A. ZAJONCHKOVSKIJ & S. M. SHAPSHAL 1974. *Karaimsko-russko-pol'skij slovar' – Słownik Karaimsko-Rosyjsko-Polski*. Moskva.
- BEIM, S. 1862. *Pamjat' o Chufut-Kale*. Odessa.
- BEZEKOWICZ, E. 1998. Genii mira i karaimy. *Brega Tavridy* 2–3: 289–299.
- CLARKE, E. 1816. *Travels in Various Countries of Europe, Asia and Africa*, Part 1: *Russia, Tathary, and Turkey*, I. London.
- CZACKI, T. 1807. Rozprawa o Karaitach. In: T. Czacki, *Rozprawa o Żydach*: 246–272.
- 1827. Issledovanie o evrejah karaitah. *Severnyj Arhiv* 6: 97–111.
- DEMIDOV, A. 1840. *Voyage dans la Russie Meridionale et la Crimée par la Hongrie, la Valahie et la Moldavie exécuté en 1837*. Paris.
- DRACHUK, V., V. SMIRNOVA & J. CHELYSHEV 1979. *Eupatoria*. Simferopol'.

⁶⁸ E.g. H. Rzewuski's letter: "les Caraïtes sont les purs sectateurs de la loi Mosaique, dégagé de toutes les superstitions de la Synagogue, hospitaliers, tolérants, avides de lumieres ..." (Szapszał 1933–34: 6).

⁶⁹ The article is based on a paper read at the Seventh Scandinavian Congress of Jewish Studies, Järvenpää, Finland, May 14, 2000.

- DUBOIS DE MONTPEREUX, F. 1843. *Voyage autour du Caucase*, VI. Paris.
- FIRKOVICH, A. 1872. *Abne zikkaron*. Vilna.
- FIRKOVICH, Z. A. (ed.) 1890. *Sbornik starinyh gramot i uzakonenij Rossijskoj imperii kasatel'no prav isostojanija rusko-poddannyh karaimov*. St. Petersburg.
- GERTSEN, A. G. 1990. *Krepostnoj ansambl Mangupa. Materialy po arheologii, istorii i etnografii Tavrii* 1: 87–166.
- GERTSEN, A. G. & J. M. MOGARICHEV 1993. *Krepost' dragotsennostej. Chufut-Kale. Kyrk-Or. Simferopol'*.
- [HLEBNICKI-JÓZEFOWICH, L.] 1877. *Wspomnienia Krymu. Kłosy* 25, no. 637.
- HOJECKI, E. 1845. *Wspomnienia w podróży po Krymie*. Warszawa.
- HOLDERNESS, M. 1827. *Journey from Riga to the Crimea*. London.
- KARAULOV, G. 1893. *Chufut-Kale i Evrei-Karaimy. Zapiski odesskogo obshchestva istorii i drevnostej* 13.
- KACZKOWSKI, K. 1829. *Dziennik podróży do Krymu, odbytej w roku 1825*, IV. Warszawa.
- KOEPPEN, P. 1837. *O drevnostiah UBK i Gor Tavricheskich. Krymskij sbornik*. St. Petersburg.
- KOHL, J. 1841. *Reisen in Suedrussland*, II. Dresden.
- KONARAKI, F. 1872. *Mangup-Kale. Zapiski odesskogo obshchestva istorii i drevnostej* 8.
- LAZUTKA, S. & E. GUDAVICHUS 1993. *Privilege to Jews Granted by Vytautas the Great in 1388 – Privilegija evrejam Vitautasa Velikogo 1388 goda*. Moscow.
- LEBEDEVA, E. I. 2000. *Ocherki po istorii krymskich karaimov-tjurkov*. Simferopol'.
- MAKOWSKI, St. 1969. *Świat sonetów krymskich Adama Mickiewicza*. Warszawa.
- MICKIEWITZ, A. 1826. *Sonety*. Moskwa.
- MILLER, P. E. 1993a. *Karait Separatism in Nineteenth-century Russia*. (Monographs of the Hebrew Union College, 16.) Cincinnati.
- 1993b. *Prayer Book politics. Studies in Bibliography and Booklore* 18: 15–26.
- MURAV'EV-APOSTOL, I. M. 1823. *Puteshestvije po Tavride v 1820 godu*. St. Petersburg.
- NOWOSIELSKI, A. [MARCINKOWSKI, A.] 1854. *Stepy, morze i góry. Szkice i wspomnienia w podróży*, V. 2. Wilno.
- OLIZAR, G. 1892. *Pamiętniki Gustava Olizara*. Lwow.
- PALLAS, P. S. 1801. *Bemerkungen auf einer Reise in die suedlichen Statthaltschaften des Russischen Reichs in den Jahren 1793 und 1794*, II. Leipzig.
- POJATA [SKIRMUNTOWA, H.] 1871. *Szkice z Krymu. Tygodnik Ilustrowany* 8, no. 201.
- 1873. *Szkice z Krymu. Wycieczka na Mangub-Kale. Kłosy* 17, no. 433.
- REMY, F. 1872. *Die Krim in ethnografischer, landschaftlicher und hygienischer Beziehung*. Odessa-Leipzig.
- STEARNS, M. 1978. *Crimean Gothic. Analysis and Etymology of the Corpus*. (Studia Linguistica et Philologica, 6.) Saratoga.
- SYROKOMLA, Wł. [KONDRATOWICZ, L.] 1857. *Wycieczki po Litwie w promieniach od Wilna*. Wilno.
- SZAPSAŁ, S. 1896. *Karaimy i Chufut-Kale v Krymu*. St. Petersburg.
- 1933–34. *Adam Mickiewicz w gościnie u karaimów. Myśl Karaimska 1933–34*: 10–12.
- VIHNOVICH, V. L. 1997. *Karaim Avraam Firkovich. Evrejskie rukopisi, istorija, puteshestvija*. St. Petersburg.